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MIGRANT WORKERS:  
A PROFILE OF THEIR RURAL RESOURCES

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It is typically assumed that migrant workers command over substantial rural resources which will supplement their wage earnings and provide social security in times of unemployment and in retirement. In order to investigate this proposition a profile of rural resources is compiled here. The following studies conducted by the Centre in recent years have provided the data base. Not all data were comparable and hence not all studies are referred to in the tabulations below.

<u>STUDIES</u> (in chronological order)	<u>MIGRANT SAMPLES</u> (number in sample)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>An in-depth inquiry into the situation of Durban-based male contract workers was sponsored by the Chamber of Mines in the late 1970's. A quota sample design was employed in which all major employers of contract workers in the area were represented. A total of 625 interviews was obtained during the period 1976-1979. Two subsamples emerged:</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Durban Zulus (N = 510)</li> <li>Durban Transkeians (N = 115)</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>An attitude survey was conducted in 1979 as part of the investigations undertaken for the Ciskei Commission. A subsample of male migrants of Xhosa descent residing mainly in the Witwatersrand area was included in the study.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ciskei Xhosas (N = 86)</li> </ul>

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- A socio-political survey was conducted during 1981 as part of the investigations undertaken for the Buthelezi Commission. The scope of the study was wide and included a subsample of Zulu male migrants residing in hostels in the Witwatersrand area.

Witwatersrand Zulus (N = 105)

- A nation-wide study of stress in the lives of migrant contract workers was commissioned by the Rural-urban Project of the Unit for Futures Research, University of Stellenbosch, in 1982. A total of 678 interviews was obtained. The quota-controlled sample design yielded two sub-samples defined as follows:

Male migrants residing in atypical circumstances in the major urban areas of the country as squatters, illegal lodgers in black townships, or temporarily and unwillingly in hostels.

Urbanising migrants (N = 478)

The control sample consisting of randomly selected male migrants residing in the Witwatersrand area.

Typical migrants (N = 198)

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- A large-scale investigation into the attitudes and circumstances of contract workers employed in the cane-growing industry in Natal was undertaken during 1982. The quota control sample design yielded the following subsamples:

Mainly male and some few female contract workers currently employed on sugar estates/farms originating from Natal/KwaZulu and the Transkei.

Cane-industry migrants (N = 856)

The first control sample consisting of randomly selected male hostel dwellers in Durban who were not employed in the sugar industry, half of whom were Zulus, the other half Transkei Xhosas.

Non-cane migrants (N = 100)

The second control sample consisting of male past migratory workers, currently residing in the Transkei, half of whom had been employed in the sugar industry. The remainder had been previously employed elsewhere away from their home area. The majority of the men were very young in their late teens and early twenties.

Young Transkei ex-migrants (N = 200)

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# RESOURCE PROFILE:

## 1. Access to arable land

	<u>access</u>
	<u>%</u>
Ciskei Xhosas	58
Witwatersrand Zulus	57
Urbanising migrants	39
Typical migrants	43
Cane industry migrants	53
Young Transkei ex-migrants*	9

\* Due to their youthfulness the young Transkei ex-migrants have not yet gained access to land for cultivation.

## 2. Details of accessible arable land

### 2.1 Tenure

	<u>total</u>			
	<u>access</u>	<u>'own'</u>	<u>shared</u>	<u>leased</u>
	<u>%</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>%</u>
Witwatersrand Zulus	57	22	35	
Urbanising migrants	39	23	11	5
Typical migrants	43	27	10	6
Cane industry migrants	53	30	21	2
Young Transkei ex-migrants	9	6	3	1

### 2.2 Mean size of arable land (rough estimate)

Durban Zulus	2,1 h
Durban Transkeians	2,2 h
Cane industry migrants	3,1 h

## 3. Details of no access to arable land

### 3.1 Access to garden land

	<u>total</u>	<u>no</u>	<u>garden</u>
	<u>no access</u>	<u>land</u>	<u>only</u>
	<u>%</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>%</u>
Cane industry migrants	47	39	8
Young Transkei ex-migrants	91	86	5

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4. Access to arable land after retirement from contract labour

4.1 Quantity and quality of retirement land

	definite access to land	probable/uncertain access	no land/no expectations of land
	%	%	%
Durban Zulus	67	21	12
Durban Transkeians	65	19	16

  

	have or expect access to land	no land/no expectations of land
	%	%
Urbanising migrants	72*	28
Typical migrants	64	36

  

	enough land to subsist	insufficient for subsistence	garden only	no land/no expectations of land
	%	%	%	%
Cane industry migrants	45	32	13	10
Zulu non-cane migrants	30	44	8	18
Xhosa non-cane migrants	32	52	8	8
Young Transkei ex- migrants	77**	12	1	10

\* The higher proportion of urbanising migrants with access or anticipated access to land is unexpected. Urbanising migrants differed from typical migrants mainly in terms of their expectations of land, in particular the temporary hostel residents in the subsample. It was observed that the category of temporary hostel migrants was occupationally and educationally more successful and might therefore hold relatively higher expectations than other urbanising migrants regarding land. A conjecture was that the temporary hostel migrants might anticipate purchasing land as a resolution to their current landless state.

\*\* As a typical expression of youthful optimism young Transkei ex-migrants may have overestimated their opportunities for gaining access to plentiful land of good quality to meet their subsistence needs.

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#### 4.2 Tenure of retirement land

	total with access to retirement land	own	shared
	%	%	%
Non-cane migrants	79	69	10

#### 5. Security of landholding in the foreseeable future

	land is secure	land is insecure	no land/no expectations of land/ garden only
	%	%	%
Durban Zulus	71	20	9
Durban Transkeians	71	15	14
Urbanising migrants	65	7	28
Typical migrants	59	5	36
Cane-industry migrants	35	19	46
Non-cane migrants	45	34	21

#### 6. Prospects for subsistence farming

Could live by farming:

	yes	possibly	no-qualified	no
	%	%	%	%
Durban Zulus	19	4	77	
Durban Transkeians	14	5	81	
Cane industry migrants	41	10	14	35
Non-cane migrants	29	13	21	37
Young Transkei ex-migrants	54*	18	10	18

\* As noted earlier possibly the high proportion of young Transkei ex-migrants indicating good farming prospects is a reflection of youthful exaggeration.

Regional conditions as well as differences in personal assessments of these may account for some of the variation in the distribution above.

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## 7. Agricultural production

### 7.1 Maize yields

Average maize yield for family use every season (rough estimate):

Cane industry migrants  
(producers only N = 448)      20,1 bags

	self-sufficient	purchase maize	no plough land
	<u>%</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>%</u>
Urbanising migrants (Split sample N = 239)	13	28	59
Typical migrants (Split sample N = 100)	11	28	61

### 7.2 Total agricultural value per annum of produce and animal sales (rough estimates):

	no relief	unqualified relief	- R50	R50-100	R101+		
	%	%	%	%	%		
1976 estimates: Durban Zulus and Transkeians (N = 325)	11	20	29	15	25		
1977 estimates: Durban Zulus and Transkeians (N = 261)	20	16	26	16	22		
	-R100	R101- R200	R201- R300	R301- R500	R501- R700	R701- R1000	R1000+
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Cane industry migrants with land and/or cattle (N = 508)	26	21	12	17	9	7	8
As proportion of total sample 59% = 15	12	7	10	6	4	5	



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7.3 Type of crops produced

	Maize	Beans	Sorghum	Potatoes	Sweet potatoes	Pumpkins	Cabbage	Peanuts	Peas	Fruit	Sugar Cane
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Durban Zulus	83	57	14	43	15	ni	7	3	2	2	
Durban Transkeians	72	50	17	23	25	ni	0	2	2	0	
Cane industry migrants	52	29	5	11	16	13	7	ni	ni	ni	ni
ni no information											

8. Cattle

	cattle ownership	number 1-2	cattle 3-5	owned 6-10	11+
	%	%	%	%	%
Durban Zulus	52	9	16	15	12
Durban Transkeians	61	14	16	16	15
Ciskei Xhosas	52	-	-	-	-
Witwatersrand Zulus	48	-	-	-	-
Cane industry migrants	25	7	8	10 (6+ owned)	
Young Transkei ex-migrants	23	10	9	4 (6+ owned)	

9. Grazing land

	adequate	inadequate	no cattle (not applicable)
	%	%	%
Durban Zulus*	60	21	19
Durban Transkeians*	78	9	13
Cane industry migrants	22	3	75
Young Transkei ex-migrants	22	1	77

\* Respondents were assessing the situation in their area and were not necessarily cattle owners themselves.

11. House in the rural area

	%
Ciskei Xhosas	61
Witwatersrand Zulus	71
Urbanising migrants	56
Typical migrants	61

12. Dependents (rough estimates)

<u>average number dependents:</u>	<u>at the homestead</u>		<u>away from the homestead</u>	
	<u>total</u>	<u>adults</u>	<u>children</u>	<u>total</u>
Durban Zulus	5,7			0,5
Durban Transkeians	5,4			1,0
Urbanising migrants		3,2	3,4	
Typical migrants		2,6	3,4	
Cane industry migrants	3,9		2,2	
Non-cane migrants	6,8	2,9	3,9	
Young Transkei ex-migrants	2,6		1,1	

COMMENTS:

In our concluding comments we make allowance for variations between samples which affect the comparability of the data. Nevertheless, we attempt to indicate trends and broad characteristics in the rural resources of migrants.

Access to land: Access to arable land varies considerably and between forty to sixty percent of the surveyed migrants have access to land. However, in all categories of migrants approximately one-fourth to under one-third have rights to fields of their own. Sharing land is a fairly common practice, particularly among younger men. As might be expected the urbanising and the youngest groups are least likely to have use of land for cultivation. The landless situation of the young Transkeian return migrants disturbs the general pattern in the profile. However, other data indicate that this situation is merely temporary and a reflection of their immature social status as adults in the rural community.

In the case of migrant workers it will be important to ascertain whether limited access to land is merely of a temporary nature and dependent on the life cycle - the situation of the young Transkeian return migrants is a case in point, or whether the migrant will be forced to sell his labour throughout his life due to the few rural resources at his disposal. Therefore, any source of information concerning access to land and security of tenure in later life is of considerable interest. A tentative estimate based on the available data is that some two-thirds to three-quarters of migrant workers will achieve access to land in late life, whilst only half of this proportion will be able to feed themselves

and their families from this land. Furthermore, up to one-third of migrants with land feel their rights as users are insecure. It would therefore appear that rural resources are not necessarily forthcoming in old age contrary to the popular assumptions on which the migrant labour system is based.

In this connection one might mention that kitchen gardens may afford some relief in cases of landlessness (mentioned by 5-10% of surveyed migrants). These and other studies indicate that vegetable gardening is widely regarded as a useful means of supplementing retirement income from sources such as pensions, life savings, insurances and children's earnings.

Agricultural output: Land holdings where available are relatively small, a rough estimate is an average of 2-3 hectares. Agricultural productivity also varies, but is generally low. Survey results confirm that maize is a staple crop. Typical yields reported by migrant workers in the cane-growing industry are 20 bags of maize per annum. However, two of three migrant households with access to land may have to purchase maize for domestic consumption. Other crops grown include beans and various types of potatoes, and sorghum. Popular vegetables are pumpkins and cabbages in some regions. Rough estimates of agricultural outputs indicate that overall only one-fourth of migrants were producing products in the value of over R100 per annum during the period 1976/77 and over R300 per annum in 1982. Among migrants with rural assets only forty percent of migrants in the cane-growing industry reported achieving outputs of over R300 per annum in 1982.

Cattle ownership: Between one-fourth to one half of the migrants surveyed are cattle owners. Cattle ownership is widely regarded as a sign of social standing among migrant workers and therefore the incidence of cattle ownership can be expected to increase with age. This explains some of the variation in the number of cattle owned. The data also suggests that cattle ownership is less widespread in regions with poor or insufficient grazing land.

Domestic responsibilities: Survey data show that some 60 to 70 percent of migrants have a house in the rural areas. Dependency rates are on average 5 to 7 persons of which approximately 2 to 3 may be adult dependents.

To sum up: Whilst it is frequently assumed that migrant workers are well provided with social security in the form of their rural resources the profile presented here points to the contrary. The data suggests that assets such as land and livestock are limited whilst dependency rates are comparatively high. It is telling that the majority of the surveyed migrants cannot live by farming at present. Whilst it can be assumed that access to land is increasingly granted to migrants as they move through the life course, the data indicate that retirement plots tend mainly to provide a domicile and only a small proportion of the income required to support the migrant and his family upon his return from contract labour. Thus, dependency on non-locally produced income may be unavoidable throughout a migrant lifetime.

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